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INTERVIEW: ROBERT BRADTKE
THE NEW AMERICAN AMBASSADOR

It's Time for Barr to Buy Pliva

From Washington to Buzin

The new U.S. Ambassador, one of the most experienced American diplomats, in his first interview for Croatian media, talks to Globus about his main duties in the new office.

By: Igor Alborghetti

It is always a problem to conduct interviews with Ambassadors. The answers are cautious, courteous and diplomatic. Especially in the inaugural, first interview with the media of a host country. The new American Ambassador to Zagreb, Robert Bradtke, is certainly cautious. According to many, he is one of the most competent State Department personnel who has ever held office in Zagreb and one of the people who understands best the regional situation. He worked in Zagreb from 1976 to 1981 and then on the so-called "Yugoslav Desk" at the State Department. He was directly involved in the Dayton negotiations. His CV reflects a successful career.

* You are, in a sense, one of the most experienced American diplomats that has ever been named as Ambassador to the Republic of Croatia. Can you tell us what kind of message does Washington send to Ivo Sanader's government with your arrival: one of warning or encouragement?

- I very much wanted to come to Croatia, and all the more so because I spent a part of my diplomatic career in Zagreb, in mid-70s. Today, your country is on the verge of entering the European Union and NATO. To me, that's perfect timing for my arrival. So, I personally want to believe that it is a message of encouragement.

Return to Zagreb

* You arrived only a few days ago and this is your first interview for Croatian media. How do you generally see the political situation in Croatia?

- It is hard to compare it to my previous experience. That was 30 years ago. Last time I was in Zagreb was in 1996, together with then-Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who met with the late President Franjo Tudjman after signing the Dayton peace agreements. True, while I worked in the State Department, I dealt with issues of NATO enlargement, which partly related to the situation in Croatia as well.

* But in past years media have been quoting some of your statements, especially the ones relating to the Gotovina issue. Because of them you are remembered as a critic of the Croatian government. How do you comment on that?

- I said that it was very important that Gotovina go to The Hague. In the context of the Republic of Croatia wishing to enter NATO, this was an extremely important issue. Ante Gotovina is in

The Hague today. He awaits a fair trial and has all needed legal protection. The role of the Croatian Government in resolving this case was very positive.

The mission in Croatia

* What will be your main mission in Zagreb? What instructions did you get in Washington?

- As much as I can, I'd like to help your country to become a part of European Union and NATO. These two things are my main duty. Of course, the outcome does not depend on me, but on the leaders of Croatia. I want to help in that sense. At the same time, there is a need to expand bilateral relations between Washington and Zagreb, which mainly revolve around the question of joining the North-Atlantic treaty. The economic cooperation should be stronger. I'd like to see more American tourists and young people coming to your country, just like young Croatians go to the U.S. I shouldn't forget cooperation with Croatia in overcoming problems in South-Eastern Europe, especially the status of Kosovo and stabilization of the situation in Serbia. In that context, the Republic of Croatia can play an important role and stand as a model for resolving difficult issues.

* The American Administration claims that the only solution for Kosovo is its full independence. But doesn't that lead to a possible instability of this region, especially in the Serbian part of Bosnia and Herzegovina that borders with Croatia?

- We did not say that Kosovo's independence is the only possible scenario. We said that we want Belgrade and Pristina to find a solution through negotiations. That is what we support and what is important. However, there cannot be a partition of Kosovo or incorporation of its parts into other countries.

Article 98

* In Croatia there is a clear political idea that the relations between Zagreb and Washington reached their peak and that nothing important will change until Croatia signs the agreement on non-extradition of American citizens to the ICC. Is that true?

- A lot has been done in the last period. Now we have reached the point where we can do even more, especially in those areas which I just mentioned.

* What about Article 98?

- There are differences about it, but that's not the essence of our bilateral relations. We have many other issues where considerable progress can be made. And, that is what I said to President Mesic.

* On several occasions our President clearly objected to the possible signing of the agreement of non-extradition of American citizens with the U.S. In general, he is known as a critic of some segments of American foreign policy, especially towards Iraq. What do you think about Mesic and Sanader?

- I met with them both. My first impressions are very positive. I think they are friends of the USA and that they will be good partners. In short, I'm looking forward to working with them on improving relations between Zagreb and Washington.

Barr and Pliva

* Are you concerned with the decrease of popularity of the USA because of the war in Iraq? To Croatians, America is no longer the favorite leader of the free world. What are you planning to do?

- Certainly I will, as much as possible, try to explain our policy on Iraq. Why we're doing what we are. Iraq is not the only global issue we're involved in. For example, in the fight against AIDS, the Administration of George W. Bush has done more than any other before. At the same time, when people talk about America today, our friends in the world and in Europe, including those in Croatia, unfortunately see us exclusively through the events in Iraq, forgetting other aspects of our policy.

* At this moment, is there any American interest in arbitration in border disputes between Croatia and Slovenia?

- Croatia and Slovenia are friends of America. We don't see that possibility existing. Zagreb and Ljubljana need to solve all open questions together, through negotiations.

* Why is there so little American investment in Croatia?

- I've been in Zagreb for too short a time to give you a broad answer. American business people generally say that it is complicated to invest in Croatia, and easier in other environments. I would like for American companies to see Croatia as a country from which they can expand further to the European Union.

* Just like the management of Barr pharmaceuticals, who are buying Pliva, said. What do you think of their acquisition?

- If Barr successfully buys Pliva, that will have a very positive effect on other American companies that wish to expand to the Croatian market.

► box 1 on pg. 28

On the first Croatian president:

"Tudjman? Let the historians judge him"

* Considering that you are well acquainted with modern Croatian politics, how would you assess the role of the first Croatian president Franjo Tudjman?

- It's hard to answer that. This should be left to the historians because a relatively short period has passed for the actual assessment of his activities to be made. Besides, I came to Zagreb to deal with the future and to look ahead. That's why I was glad to be present at the commemoration of Nikola Tesla's 150th birthday last week, together with President Stipe Mesic, Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, Speaker of Parliament Vladimir Seks and President of Serbia Boris Tadic. It was a magnificent gathering which clearly showed that people want to look ahead. That is precisely what I wish to contribute to during my mandate in Zagreb.

* Prime Minister said then that there will be no more wars in this region. Many saw that as the final ending to the Croatian-Serbian war. Do you believe this to be so?

- I support the words of Ivo Sanader.

► box 1 on pg. 30

Key Dayton man
The great Warren Christopher

Warren Christopher is a skillful negotiator. I enjoyed working with him. He did amazing things in the Middle East back in 1996 and I cannot skip that, especially in the context of current events in Lebanon. Because of his mediation, Israel and Hezbollah reached a ceasefire. I was with him during those dramatic negotiations, which were conducted in two places: Tel Aviv; that is, Jerusalem, and Damascus. We flew from one city to the other, true “shuttle diplomacy”. Furthermore, his contribution to creating the Dayton peace agreement is huge, although still not completely understood.

Ambassador Richard Holbrook was in the spotlight then, but I cannot forget the last days of negotiations when Secretary of State Christopher flew directly from Japan and did that last, I’d say crucial, effort so that all the parties would agree with Dayton agreement.

He is not a person who likes to take credit. He gives it to others. That’s how he was in Dayton. His ideas, given in critical moments of a standstill in negotiations between Croats, Serbs and Muslims, led to the final success of the peace conference.

► excerpt on pg. 28

Positive effect

“If Barr buys Pliva, that will have a positive effect on other American companies that wish to expand to Croatian market.”

► caption under photo on pg. 28

Diplomatic Marriage

Bradtke with wife Marsha Barnes, the Ambassador to Suriname, on vacation in French Guyana.

► caption under photo on pg. 29

A country for business

“I would like for American companies to see Croatia as a country from which they can expand further to the European Union.”